Julia Butterfly Hill defends California redwoods, 1999

Timing
December 10, 1997
to:
December 23, 1999

Location and Goals
Country:
United States
Location City/State/Province:
Stafford, Humboldt County, California
View Location on Map
Goals:
1. To protect Luna (the redwood tree in which the tree sit was held)
2. To slow down logging process in the immediate area
3. To raise broad based public awareness

Methods
Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 033. Fraternization
- 037. Singing
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in
- 168. Nonviolent raids
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 013. Deputations
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 4th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 013. Deputations
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 5th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 013. Deputations
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 6th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 158. Self-exposure to the elements
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Segment Length:
Approximately 4 months (123 days)

**Classifications**
Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Julia Butterfly Hill

Partners:
Earth First! - direct action campaign started in 1980 to protect the redwoods of Humboldt County

Robert Parker - organizer who volunteered his services to handle press outreach and creating a cohesive media approach

Shakespeare - member of Earth First! who agreed to continue supplying Julia when Earth First! withdrew its support

External allies:
EPIC-(Environmental Protection Information Center)
AIM- (American Indian Movement)
Veterans for Peace
United Steelworkers of America

DNH- (Dave’s Not Here)- organization created in honor of David “Gypsy” Chain, a member of Earth First! killed on an action

John Goodman - striking steelworker of Kaiser Aluminum

David Foster - leader of United Steelworkers of America

Involvement of social elites:
Mikey Hart - member of the band the Grateful Dead

Woody Harrelson - American actor

Willie Nelson - American country western singer

Merle Haggard - American country western singer

Lacy J Dalton - American country western singer
Senator Tom Hayden

Bonnie Raitt- American blues singer

Joan Baez- American folk singer

Joining/exiting order of social groups
Groups in 1st Segment:

- AIM
- EPIC
- Earth First
- Lacy J Dalton
- Merle Haggard
- Mikey Hart
- Robert Parker
- Shakespeare
- Veterans for Peace
- Willie Nelson
- Woody Harrelson

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Senator Tom Hayden

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- DNH(Daves Not Here)
- David Foster
- John Goodman
- United Steelworkers of America

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Bonnie Raitt
- Joan Baez

 Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:
Approximately 4 months (123 days)

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Pacific Lumber Company, owned by Maxxam Corporation
Charles Hurwitz- head of Maxxam Corp.

John Campbell- President of Pacific Lumber Company

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
President John Campbell arrived to negotiate with Julia carrying a gift of a six pack of Pepsi.
Campaigner violence:
None known
Repressive Violence:
Julia was subject to intimidation tactics such as helicopter fly-bys and the felling of trees dangerously close to her. In addition she experienced verbal abuse.

Success Outcome
Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
6 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
3 points out of 3 points
Total points:
10 out of 10 points
Notes on outcomes:

The President of Pacific Lumber agreed to the preservation of Luna, in addition to a 200 foot buffer zone. Also Julia’s 738-day tree sit earned massive media attention from sources such as the Los Angeles Times and CNN news network.

Julia chose to remain in the tree till December 23, 1999, five days after the final agreement was finalized. While conducting her tree sit Julia also laid the groundwork for her still active organization Circle of Life.

Visible support for Julia’s tree sit grew to include cities and organizations across the United States and the world

The economy of the town of Stafford, located in Humboldt County, has been dominated by timber production since the seventeenth century. Pacific Lumber Company, a family owned company, was the primary producer of lumber in the area from 1885 to 1985. Then in 1985 Maxxam Corporation, a Texas based company staged a hostile takeover of Pacific Lumber. This marked an aggressive stepping up in cutting, resulting in a policy of clear cutting. This change in policy was met with wariness by many local people, who feared the long-term sustainability of this method. In addition, clear cutting was coupled with the heavy rainfall characteristic of Humboldt County. This was most likely linked to a massive mudslide on December 31, 1996. No one was injured in this event but the basin of Stafford where the majority of homes were located was filled with between eight to seventeen feet of mud, destroying many houses. Stafford residents blamed the loss of their homes on Pacific Lumber Company’s new policy of clear cutting. The company was taken to court but found not guilty, prompting the California Department of Forestry to approve a plan to clear cut another slope.
Into this environment stepped Julia Hill, who would become the icon of the campaign against Pacific Lumber Company. Hill arrived in Humboldt County in June 1996. She had journeyed to California from Arkansas seeking renewal following a serious car accident one year earlier. She felt an instant connection to the redwood trees and decided to return to Arkansas, sell all her possessions, and return to Humboldt County to work to save the redwoods.

Having returned to Stafford, Hill contacted the Environmental Protection Information Center, which gave her a number for a base camp of activists working toward the preservation of the redwoods. When Hill contacted the base camp she was informed that the camp was closing down for the season. Despite this, the contact person also informed Hill of a protest in the nearby town of Eureka. Though disorganized, this protest allowed Hill to form several contacts including Shakespeare, a resident of the activist base camp. Shakespeare was a member of Earth First!, a direct action campaign started in 1980 in protest to the destruction of the redwoods above Humboldt County. He filled Hill in on the culture surrounding the base camp, including the taking on of code names. Hill chose Butterfly as her activist name and decided to stay at the camp as long as she could be useful. She was not yet aware of the existence of Earth First!, and believed the collection of activists to be largely disorganized.

An opportunity to be useful appeared within a few weeks when a man at the base camp asked for volunteers to take part in a tree sit; Hill immediately volunteered. So she and two others set off to begin their action. The tree in which they would be staging their action had been dubbed Luna, and was particularly useful for a tree sit since its lower branches were missing, making pursuit difficult. Hill and the others set off determined to protect Luna from nearby loggers. Unfortunately within a few days, Hill came down with a serious bout of illness and was forced to return to the base camp. Over the next few weeks she spent her time tabling and informing herself on the history of activism in the area. Then in December it was announced that the two tree sitters who had been stationed in Luna were coming down. Thus, taking this second opportunity, Hill again volunteered.

On December 10, 1997, she and two other activists journeyed to the site of the tree sit. It was along the way that Hill first learned that this was an Earth First! organized action. The knowledge did not alter her commitment to the tree sit either positively or negatively, as she felt a spiritual calling to protect the redwoods. Upon arriving at the tree, Luna, the activists were assaulted by a group of loggers. Despite this Hill and one other activist managed to scale Luna. Both remained in the tree until January 4, 1998, when the other activist was forced to go down for his emotional health, leaving Hill alone in the tree.

Just a few weeks later Hill was subject to intimidation by the Pacific Lumber Company, who sent men to fly a helicopter directly at the platform in which Hill was precariously perched. Hill managed to video tape this attack and sent the tape to the Federal Aviation Administration, who sent the Pacific Lumber Company a letter of indictment saying it was illegal to fly a helicopter within 200 feet of a human. This effectively ended the helicopter attacks.

Shortly after this, Earth First! decided that Hill should leave Luna since the organization felt it didn’t have the resources to continue supporting the action and they worried any harm that befell Hill would reflect badly on the organization. However, Hill did not consider herself a member of Earth First! and felt it was not time to stop the action. She managed to convince her friend Shakespeare to agree to continue supplying her with food in the event that Earth First! cut off its support.

Around this time the Pacific Lumber Company began employing security guards, whose full-time occupation was to remain at the base of Luna, preventing resupplies to Hill. Upon their arrival they offered her a twenty-four hour grace period in which she could come down without being arrested. Hill refused this offer and unsuccessfully attempted to befriend the guards. As the days passed and Hill’s food supplies dwindled several
unsuccessful attempts were made at a resupply. Just when the situation seemed too dire and Hill began seriously considering coming down, Earth First! staged a risky attempt to get Hill food. Twenty Earth First!ers arrived with bags of food, and signaled Hill to create a distraction. She unfurled a 35 foot banner and began singing, which effectively distracted the guards for several seconds, during which all twenty of the Earth First!ers made a run for Hill’s supply line. Two of the twenty were successful, allowing Hill to continue her action. This event marked a rallying around Hill. In addition, the guards left two days later, due to inclement weather conditions and the growing expense.

On day 71 of her tree sit, a photographer arrived to see Hill, managing to hike all the way to her platform. He proposed her staying in the tree for 100 days, breaking the previous record for tree sitting of 90 days. He correctly suggested that this would present the media with an interesting story and would drastically increase coverage of the event. Indeed media coverage was already increasing, and by February Hill’s story had been featured in publications such as the Los Angeles Times, Newsweek Magazine, and People Magazine. Then on April 5 Cable News Network (CNN) scheduled a televised debate between Hill and President of Pacific Lumber Company John Campbell. This upswing in media attention had two major results. First, activist Robert Parker stepped forward offering to act as the media representative for the campaign, bringing a cohesive image to the media. Second, the increase in media coverage deepened the split between Hill and Earth First!, who felt she was not portraying the hardliner image they endorsed.

As the 100 days approached, Hill began a fast and endlessly reiterated for the media her three goals: to protect Luna, to slow down logging in the area, and to raise awareness in a broad base of the public. As the 100 days came and went, the media as well as Pacific Lumber Company were shocked when Hill announced her intention to continue her tree sit. At this point Pacific Lumber Company adopted as its official stance a policy of waiting Hill out.

In March of 1998 Hill began regularly calling John Campbell, despite the fact that none of her calls were returned. Hill also began speaking out against the Headwaters Forest Agreement, a plan to preserve 3500 acres of the redwoods, but at the expense of several endangered species and thousands more acres of ancient growth. Hill drafted a statement against this agreement and held a phone conference with both the State Assembly and the Senate. In July of 1998 Hill held a press conference, stating her revised demands. This infuriated many Earth First!ers who were angered she was negotiating. Around this time Campbell began taking Hill’s phone calls, establishing the basis for a relationship, which ultimately allowed for negotiation.

In Fall 1998 Pacific Lumber Company sent out a new group of security guards trained in pain compliance, which posed great hardship for the Earth First! activists on the ground. Then on September 17 Earth First! member David Gypsy Chain was killed by a tree felled by a Pacific Lumber Company logger, prompting an investigation. Also in September, in part due to the death of Chain, Pacific Lumber Company’s logging license was suspended and then revoked. This led to huge cutbacks, and many local loggers were fired, prompting increasingly negative feeling toward Hill and Earth First!. Within weeks Pacific Lumber Company’s license was reinstated, but many workers were not rehired. Also around this time Hill asked for the help of Earth First to construct a much lower, second platform to accommodate the huge traffic of media and celebrities.

Then, on February 8, 1999, Pacific Lumber guards nailed an official eviction notice to the trunk of Luna. This action was almost solely symbolic and had no real effect. Also in February Campbell visited Hill in person, bearing a six-pack of Pepsi. This marked the beginning of negotiations between Hill and the Pacific Lumber Company. In April of 1999, on Earth Day, Hill was visited by celebrities Bonnie Raitt, Joan Baez, and a number of steelworkers, whose union had recently allied with Hill against Pacific Lumber Company. Mid-April 1999 marked the drawing up of a proposed agreement between Hill and Campbell, which stated that Luna, as well as a 200-foot buffer zone would be preserved and that timber already felled in the area was the lawful property of
Pacific Lumber Company. This agreement was officially agreed to July 14, 1999, but the signing was stalled.

A major factor in the stalling of this agreement was that Pacific Lumber Company wanted to restrict what statements Hill could say when she came down from the tree. Hill refused to make concessions in this area, particularly after Campbell began leaking details of the talk to the press. Hill then called a press conference, in the process gaining the support of Senator Dianne Feinstein, who pressured Pacific Lumber Company to loosen its demands. Finally, on December 18 the Luna Preservation Agreement was documented and recorded. Five days later, on December 23, 1999, Hill came down from her platform, ending a 738-day tree sit.

Research Notes
Influences:

Former tree sit-ins conducted by members of Earth First! (1)

Sources:
Martin, Glen (1999-12-20). "Tree-Sitter Recounts Life In the Clouds: Julia Butterfly Hill is tearful and triumphant". San Francisco Chronicle.

Additional Notes:
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